

Making Life Work: K-12 Education

“One of our priorities this year will be to move heaven and earth to fix our education system for the most vulnerable.”

Background:

On February 5, 2013 Majority Leader Eric Cantor delivered a speech at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) entitled “Making Life Work.” Below are some the facts, figures, and background information referenced in the speech.

Federal Involvement in K-12 Education:

In April of 1965, the Elementary Secondary Education Act was enacted into law. President Lyndon Johnson summarized the purpose of the legislation when arguing for its passage a few days prior stating:

This bill has a simple purpose: To improve the education of young Americans.... How many young lives have been wasted; how many families now live in misery; how much talent has the Nation lost; because we have failed to give all our people a chance to learn.... This bill represents a national determination that this shall no longer be true. Poverty will no longer be a bar to learning, and learning shall offer an escape from poverty.... For this truly is the key which can unlock the door to a great society.¹

Today, the federal government spends approximately \$15 billion a year towards the same goal,² distributing the funds via formula to states and local school districts. Yet we have little to show for the hundreds of billions of dollars that have been invested over the past 48 years.³

In November of 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted into law providing federal resources for education of students with disabilities. Renamed the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, today Congress provides over \$11 billion annually to state and local school districts to help educate disabled children.

Together these two programs – Title I and IDEA – constitute roughly two-thirds of federal education spending.

¹ Farkas, George, and L. Shane Hall. "Can Title I Attain Its Goal?." *Brookings Papers on Education Policy* 2000. 59-103 (2000): 59-103. Web. 4 Feb. 2013.

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/brookings_papers_on_education_policy/v2000/2000.1farkas.html>.

² United States. Department of Education. *Budget Overview for Fiscal Year 2012 Congressional Action*. Washington, D.C.: 2012. Web. <<http://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget12/12action.pdf>>.

³ Coulson, Andrew J.. "President To Call For Big New Ed. Spending- Here's A Look At How Well That's Worked In The Past." *CATO Institute*. CATO Institute, 27 Jan 2010. Web. <<http://www.cato.org/blog/president-call-big-new-ed-spendingheres-look-how-thats-worked-past>>.

Education Dollars Following Students:

In 2001 the San Francisco school district began implementation of a weighted student formula whereby individual school budgets are determined not just on the basis of the number of students enrolled, but the basis of the characteristics of the students enrolled.

Under the weighted student formula, money follows each student to his or her school. Additional funds are provided for English language learners, low socio-economic status students, and special education students.⁴ Parents submit a preference list of the schools they would like their child to attend. The school district maintains an interactive online school selector to help parents compare schools based on the special education services, language services, and before and after school programs provided and even the hours of operation.⁵

Making Life Work Proposals:

In the AEI speech, Majority Leader Cantor discussed the following policy proposals:

Rather than directing Title I and IDEA funding via formula to states and local school districts, current law should be amended to allow funds to follow the eligible child. Parents would have the option of using the funds to send their child to another public school, charter school, or private school.

This proposal would build dramatically on the limited school choice proposals currently available under Title I and IDEA.

Under current law, children are eligible for public school choice (including public charter schools) when the Title I school they attend has not made adequate yearly progress in improving student achievement--- as defined by the state--for two consecutive years or longer and is therefore identified as needing improvement, corrective action or restructuring. Also, students from low-income families who remain in Title I schools that fail to meet state standards for at least three years are eligible to receive supplemental educational services with their Title I dollars. In addition, children are eligible for school choice when they attend any "persistently dangerous school," as defined by the individual state. Any child who has been the victim of a violent crime on the grounds of his or her school is also eligible for school choice.⁶

Under current law, a child with a disability may be placed in a private school by the local school district or state as a means of fulfilling the legal requirement that the child be

⁴ "Introduction to the Weighted Student Formula And Site-Based Budgeting." *SFUSD: San Francisco Public Schools*. San Francisco Unified School District. Web. <[http://www.sfusd.edu/en/assets/sfusd-staff/councils-and-committees/files/WSF Overview_02_2012.pdf](http://www.sfusd.edu/en/assets/sfusd-staff/councils-and-committees/files/WSF%20Overview_02_2012.pdf)>.

⁵ "Interactive School Selector." *SFUSD: San Francisco Public Schools*. San Francisco Unified School District. Web. <<http://www.sfusd.edu/en/enroll-in-sfusd-schools/interactive-school-selector.html>>.

⁶ United States. Department of Education. *Find Schools & After-Care, School Choice*. Washington, D.C.: 2004. Web. <<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/schools/choice/choice.html>>.

provided a free appropriate public education. In this situation, the full cost is paid for by the state or local school district. A child with a disability may also be placed in a private school by his or her parents. In this situation, the cost of the private school placement is not paid by the local school district unless it is determined that the school has not made a free appropriate public education available to the child in a timely manner.⁷

Expanding these limited school choice options would ensure that no child has to needlessly wait for their school to get better in order to access a quality education that meets their needs.

⁷ CRS Report "The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): Private Schools." *Congressional Research Service*. Congressional Research Service, 10 Mar 2011. Web.